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Academic
Freedom and
Excellence

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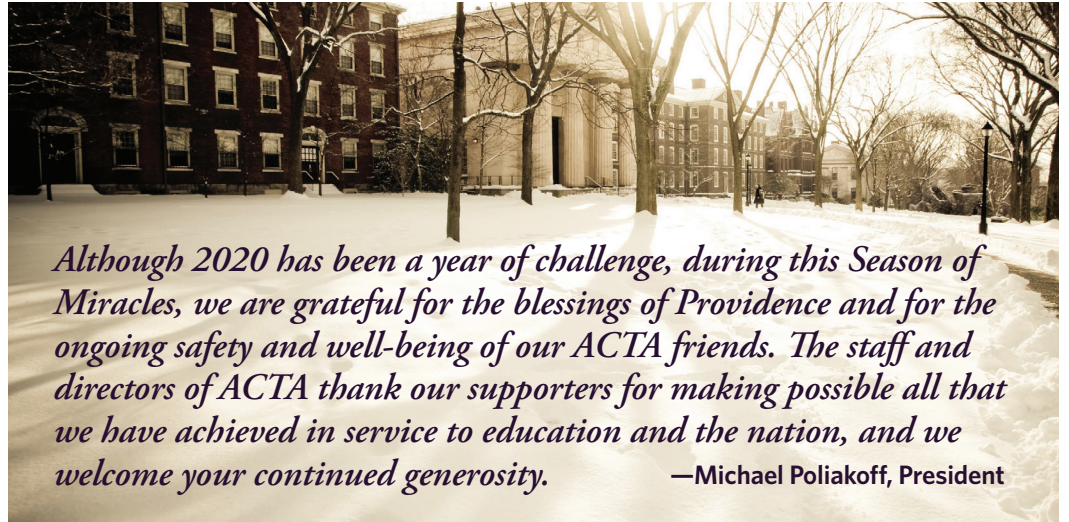
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A Letter from the President



Although 2020 has been a year of challenge, during this Season of Miracles, we are grateful for the blessings of Providence and for the ongoing safety and well-being of our ACTA friends. The staff and directors of ACTA thank our supporters for making possible all that we have achieved in service to education and the nation, and we welcome your continued generosity.

—Michael Poliakoff, President

Dear ACTA Friend,

As we head into the busy holiday season, I hope that you and your family continue to be safe and healthy. And I earnestly ask that you keep the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) in mind as you plan your year-end charitable giving. Your support is critical in helping us advance our mission to ensure that our colleges and universities truly serve the nation's needs. Our work is more important than ever, as the pandemic continues its upheaval of America's colleges and universities. Despite the challenges, I am pleased to report that ACTA has redoubled its efforts—and achievements. This year, we:

- Launched a campaign to help colleges and universities respond to the

COVID-19 pandemic, including a repository of resources—reports, podcasts, webinars, eNewsletters, and primers—for our network of trustees, university leaders, and policymakers.

- Counseled higher education leadership on ways to implement long overdue changes, replacing the wasteful “distributional requirements” and “electives” system with a solid, foundational core curriculum.
- Advocated an end to the burgeoning student life programming that squanders funds and intrudes on student privacy and freedom of speech.
- Significantly expanded our Academic Affairs program, reaching out to over 50,000 high school counselors and

(continued on 2)

Watch 25th Anniversary Online Celebration!

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, we have had to postpone our Fall 2020 live event. In its stead, we will launch an online celebration in December. Stay tuned for details! ACTA's official **25TH Plus One Anniversary Celebration** will take place in Fall 2021 on November 11–12. As good fortune would have it, we were able to schedule the same exciting roster of events, culminating at the storied Library of Congress. Please visit [GoACTA.org/anniversary](https://www.GoACTA.org/anniversary) for details and registration.

www.GoACTA.org

info@GoACTA.org

1-888-ALUMNI-8

David Olive, President
Bluefield College
Bluefield, Virginia

“Blessings upon you and everyone working to strengthen general education curricula in our colleges and universities.”

Jere Morehead, President
University of Georgia

“As a university devoted to excellence in undergraduate education, UGA is proud to receive this recognition, once again, for our rigorous core curriculum”

Editor’s Note: In September, ACTA released its What Will They Learn? 2020–21 survey, an evaluation of the general education requirements at over 1,100 U.S. colleges and universities. The University of Georgia and Bluefield College are two of only 23 schools to receive an “A.”

Becky Luntsford, Assistant Corporate Secretary
Board of Trustees, University of West Florida

“We are always searching for beneficial information for our university’s Board of Trustees, and it is wonderful to know that

ACTA offers so many resources at our fingertips. I visit your website often and enjoy the online articles and publications, especially those pertaining to trusteeship.”

Frank Strauss, Trustee
Wiley College
Marshall, Texas

“Thank you very much for your help with this info. I can assure you that it will be well used. Keep up your fine work.”

Robert Holladay, Professor
Tallahassee Community College

“I am so pleased that the Department of Education withdrew the rule. ACTA’s willingness to get involved in this rule challenge changed everything and made this of national interest. I could not be more grateful to them.”

Editor’s Note: ACTA recently pushed a petition through the Florida courts to save a state mandate that requires all students at public institutions to demonstrate competency in civic literacy.

Letter from the President, continued from 1

3,000 high school principals at Roman Catholic and charter high schools. We introduced them to our signature publication, *What Will They Learn?* (WWTL), an annual evaluation of the general education programs at over 1,100 colleges and universities.

- Provided to more than 1,100 state legislators a customized overview of each state’s WWTL grades for all public institutions alongside comparison data for nearby states.
- Launched Intelligent College Giving, a series of print and video interviews with donors who have made innovative, meaningful gifts to higher education.
- Released *Southern Exposure: A Look at Mississippi’s Public Colleges and Universities*. The Mississippi House of Representatives shortly thereafter

passed a bill to secure free speech rights of students on public campuses. We will continue to work with our partner, the Mississippi Center for Public Policy, in the 2021 legislative session.

- In partnership with Braver Angels, we conducted several debates on college campuses (via Zoom) in which students learned how to discuss controversial political topics civilly and without rancor.
- Recognized University of California–Davis Professor Abigail Thompson and Princeton University Professor Joshua Katz as our 2020 Heroes of Intellectual Freedom.
- Successfully challenged the Florida Department of Education’s proposed rule that would have weakened legislation that requires students to demonstrate competency

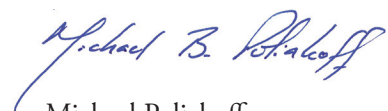
in civic literacy in order to graduate from a public college or university.

- Provided expert testimony before the Maryland House of Delegates on a civics education bill.

These are just a few of the highlights of the progress we have made in 2020 to improve higher education. With your ongoing support, we will continue to lead the way in defending free speech on campus, promoting curriculum reform, and making college more affordable.

Thank you for your generosity. Without you, our important work would be impossible. Happy Holidays!

Sincerely,



Michael Poliakoff
President

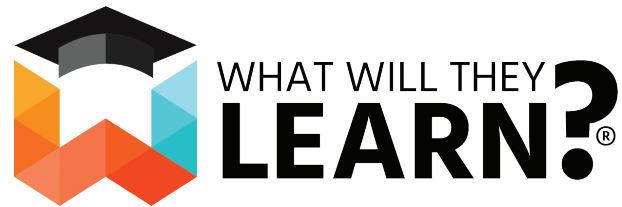
The 2020–21 What Will They Learn?[®] Results Are In!

On September 28, ACTA launched *What Will They Learn? 2020–21*, our guide to what college rankings do not tell you. Now in its 12th year, the report and accompanying website, WhatWillTheyLearn.com, provide an annual evaluation of the core curriculum requirements at over 1,100 U.S. colleges and universities.

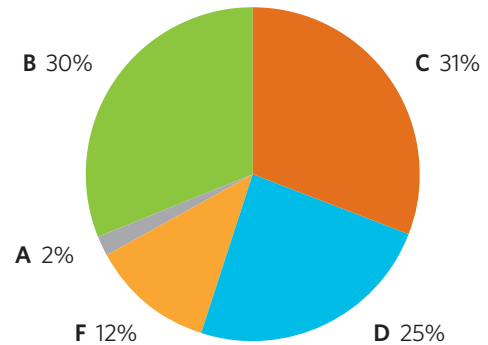
ACTA's What Will They Learn?[®] project is a rating system and college choice tool unlike any other, one that focuses on what students are actually learning. We grade institutions on an "A" through "F" scale based on whether they require undergraduate students pursuing baccalaureate degrees in the arts and sciences to complete courses in Composition, Literature, (intermediate-level) Foreign Language, U.S. Government or History, Economics, Mathematics, and Natural Science that meet carefully defined criteria. These subjects, identified in consultation with ACTA's Council of Scholars, provide students with the knowledge and abilities that prepare them for a rewarding career, informed citizenship, and meaningful engagement in their communities.

ACTA publishes the results every September with two major goals in mind: We aim to encourage institutions to strengthen their core curricular requirements and to maintain rigorous programs where standards are high. We are delighted to announce a new "A" school this year, Wyoming Catholic College. Ten other colleges improved their curricula last year.

Unfortunately, in the last two years, 28 schools removed their literature requirement while eight removed the interme-



GRADE BREAKDOWN



mediate-level foreign language requirement from their cores. That is why we are working harder than ever to counsel families, education leaders, and a new audience of over 51,000 high school counselors about the importance of selecting a college or university with a strong core curriculum. To that end, we distribute our findings widely—to state and national media outlets, on social media, to over 23,000 higher education leaders around the country, and to over 1,100 state legislators on education committees.

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Madonna President Cites ACTA in University Address

In his State of the University Address, delivered in August, Madonna University President Michael Grandillo referenced the disturbing findings of ACTA's *What Will They Learn?* (WWTL) survey, saying, "Nationally, only 18% of colleges and universities require students to take a single course in U.S. history or government. We can do much better and should make sure our students enroll in one of these courses that inspire our students to take their part in a future where the labor and the dreams of our forefathers bear a rich and bountiful harvest from sea to shining sea."

Madonna University, located in Michigan, earns a "B" in ACTA's 2020–21 WWTL survey for requiring four of seven essential liberal arts subjects in its core curriculum. Just 30% of colleges earn a "B" rating, with the majority of schools scoring a "C", "D", or "F". In his address to the university, President Grandillo highlighted ACTA's mission to promote rigorous academic study: "I agree with higher education associations like the American Council of Trustees and Alumni that college leaders must do more to ensure that students graduate with a foundational knowledge of our nation's history and government, not simply so they are able to quote revered texts . . . but, rather . . . to keep alive a spirit, that for more than two and a half centuries has been passed down, a dream from the pen of Jefferson to the soaring rhetoric of Martin Luther King, a belief that all are created equal, all endowed by their creator with a right to life and liberty and happiness."

ACTA applauds Madonna's commitment to academic excellence and calls upon other institutions to build strong general education programs that prepare students to be engaged and informed citizens. ●

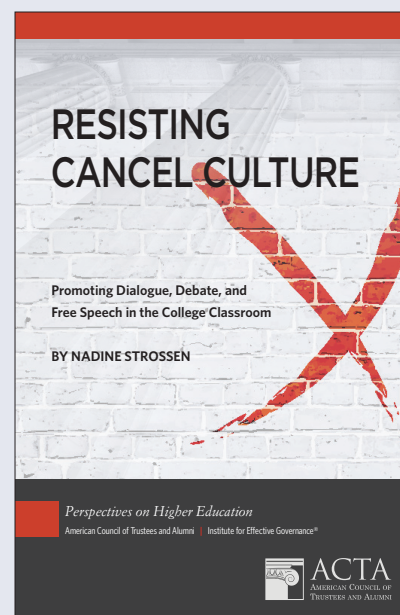
ACTA will soon publish a new essay in our *Perspectives on Higher Education* series, authored by Nadine Strossen, John Marshall Harlan II Professor of Law Emerita at New York Law School. The essay, titled *Resisting Cancel Culture: Promoting Dialogue, Debate, and Free Speech in the College Classroom*, comes at a timely moment when many colleges and universities across the country are encountering the formidable challenge of guarding free speech on virtual platforms.

In her essay, Ms. Strossen, former president of the American Civil Liberties Union, distinguishes the difference between a “free expression culture” that all universities ought to promote and the “cancel culture” that has unfortunately emerged at many institutions. She writes, “In a nutshell, a free expression culture seeks to further debate and discussion. The opposite is true of cancel culture, which instead seeks to end discussion, or at least truncate it, by summarily dismissing certain ideas—or even certain speakers—as ineligible for inclusion in the exchange.” She dismantles common arguments against cultivating a free expression culture, particularly the idea that exercising free speech rights conflicts with important campus values such as equality and inclusivity: “As many towering human rights champions have eloquently explained, equality rights are especially dependent on robust freedom of speech and are especially endangered by speech restrictions.”

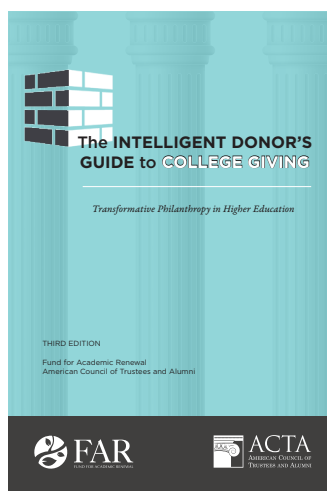
To counter the social pressure, self-censorship, and incivility that often result from cancel culture, Ms. Strossen draws on her extensive experience as a professor of law and expert debater. The pedagogical approaches prevalent in law schools—primarily learning how to articulate and advocate for all plausible ratio-

nales that the other side may put forth—should also be employed in classrooms at all levels, from primary school to higher education. “When students are required to lay out a range of evidence and conclusions, but not asked to identify themselves with any of these, they are shielded from the potentially punitive response that could well deter them from personally advocating any unpopular positions. . . . any student who lays out [a controversial position] is a ‘devil’s advocate,’ not the devil himself.” Moreover, those with debate experience “tend throughout their later lives to be more open-minded than average, more actively seeking out information and ideas from diverse sources and engaging critically with them.”

Ms. Strossen’s penetrating analysis is a valuable addition to ACTA’s arsenal of resources for college leaders, as we work to ensure that every campus cultivates a vibrant culture of free expression. An eloquent introduction by Brookings Institution scholar Jonathan Rauch underlines the high urgency of its message. Please contact ACTA to request a copy or download the essay online at GoACTA.org. ●



FAR Publishes New Resource for Donors



The Fund for Academic Renewal (FAR) is proud to announce the release of the third edition of *The Intelligent Donor’s Guide to College Giving*. This signature ACTA publication is an ideal resource for anyone considering a gift to higher education. With declining enrollment and the continuing challenges of the coronavirus pandemic, academic institutions are facing unprecedented financial difficulties. Thoughtful philanthropy has more potential than ever to shape the future of our nation’s colleges and universities.

In this edition of *The Intelligent Donor’s Guide*, readers will find the stories behind gifts that are bringing intellectual diversity and academic rigor to campuses across the country, as well as the hard lessons from controversies over past gifts. Discover the principles of transformative higher education giving, the most common pitfalls that donors face, and innovative ways to make a difference. From locating a faculty friend to help implement the vision of your gift to addressing the challenges of protecting academic freedom, *The Intelligent Donor’s Guide* can offer advice.

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Students Learn Civil Discourse through ACTA Debates

In partnership with student groups and Braver Angels—a bipartisan organization committed to mending political polarization—ACTA has held virtual debates at colleges and universities across the country this fall. These events are led by trained moderators from ACTA or Braver Angels and are modeled on parliamentary debate. Student debaters, each from a different side of the political spectrum, present their views in a formal statement; then audience members pose questions to the presenters, inspiring a passionate, yet respectful discourse.

On October 1, ACTA and Braver Angels, joined by the Texas Wesleyan Student Government and Hatton Sumners Scholars, hosted a virtual debate at Texas Wesleyan University, attended by 50 students. During the exciting colloquy on the topic, “Trash or Treasure: Should Confederate statues remain across America?”, participants from all sides of the issue carefully listened to each other and were challenged by

opposing perspectives. Another debate, held on October 6 with Linn Benton Community College and surrounding Oregon schools, drew nearly 60 participants to dissect the question, “Have the Portland protests done more



good than harm?” Later in the month, students from Yale, Princeton, Harvard, Columbia, Fordham, Stanford, and Dartmouth sparred over the topic, “Resolved: American Democracy is in Irreversible Decline.” And on October

21, students from George Washington University (GWU), Georgetown University, and surrounding Washington, DC, schools debated the issue, “Should the U.S. Implement Term Limits for Supreme Court Justices?” Stephen Joel Trachtenberg, president emeritus of GWU and a member of ACTA’s board, delivered welcoming remarks.

Despite a contentious election season, these debates show that college students are eager to rise above political mudslinging and engage peers who have contrasting views. One Texas Wesleyan student commented, “This is what I think civil discourse should be at every level of government.” We encourage more schools to provide opportunities for students to learn from each other and engage in robust, yet respectful debate, a hallmark of the American university tradition. ●

FAR Publishes New Resource, *continued from 4*

Giving well is complicated, as are the issues facing our colleges and universities, but higher education is too important to abandon. Whether making a large or small gift, your first gift or your hundredth, *The Intelligent Donor’s Guide* can help you be confident that you are making a positive impact. For your complimentary copy, please email rrichards@AcademicRenewal.org or call (202) 467-6787. ●

“Targeted philanthropy is one of the most effective ways to deliver the focus and intellectual integrity higher education so desperately needs. The Fund for Academic Renewal can help donors restore excellence to higher education through thoughtful, selective giving.”

—Jane Barrows Tatibouet
Emeritus Regent, University of Hawaii





H E A R D C A M P U S ON

Professor Removed from Course at USC

Greg Patton, professor of business communication at the University of Southern California (USC), was removed from teaching on September 8 after using the Mandarin word “neige”—the equivalent of the English “um” or “er”—in a discussion about how to avoid pauses and filler words when speaking in public. Black business school students issued a letter, complaining that “the way he pronounced the word was exactly like the word NIGGA and offended all the Black members of our class.” Following the outcry, the USC Marshall School of Business suspended him from the course and initiated an investigation into his teaching.

Professor Patton had used the example in his class for many years without complaint. More than 100 alumni, most of Chinese ethnicity or nationality, wrote a letter in his support, saying that his pronunciation was accurate and a highly “effective illustration of the use of pauses.” They commented, “A few of us, but many of our parents, lived through mainland China’s Cultural Revolution . . . This current incident, and Marshall’s response so far, seem disturbingly similar to prevalent behavior in China at that time—spurious accusations against innocent people, which escalated into institutional insanity.”

USC’s investigation eventually found that “the use of the Mandarin term had a legitimate pedagogical purpose,” but Professor Patton will not return to teaching in the MBA program. ACTA urges the leadership of USC to use the incident as an opportunity to show the campus community how destructive their growing “cancel culture” has become to teaching and learning.

Colleges Must Remain Vigilant Combating Student Drug Use

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) has released the 2019 results from its Monitoring the Future study, which examines patterns of substance use among adolescents and adults. The study found that vaping marijuana and vaping nicotine has “risen sharply” in the last three years among college-age young adults (19–22 years old). The percentage of college students who reported vaping marijuana in the past month increased from 5.2% in 2017 to 14% in 2019. Thirty-three percent of college students reported binge drinking.

As ACTA discussed in its 2019 report, *Addressing College Drinking and Drug Use*, student marijuana use can contribute to cognitive damage, including impeded learning and memory. Researchers have found that alcohol and marijuana use can have a negative impact on GPAs. Nora Volkow, director of NIDA, remarked, “Many young people may view vaping and cannabis use as ‘safer,’ but the reality is that nicotine is highly addictive, and cannabis can also be addictive, particularly in younger adults for whom the brain is still developing.”

Up to 85% of college students say that they are facing heightened anxiety due to the pandemic, amid school closures and the shift to online learning. Many students may turn to alcohol and drugs to cope with the stress. It is more important than ever that college leaders ensure the safety and well-being of the campus community. College leaders can find diverse, proven strategies to tackle student substance use in ACTA’s report. To receive a copy, please contact us at info@GoACTA.org or (202) 467-6787. ●

What Will They Learn?®, *continued from 3*

Our newly redesigned WhatWillTheyLearn.com allows families quickly and efficiently to search for schools by region, WWTL grade, tuition range, and institutional type. In recent months, we also launched a new webpage about the importance of choosing a campus with a free and open marketplace of ideas, and we added new details on each university’s information page, including student-to-faculty ratios, cohort default rates, alert indices for campuses that operate repressive bias response teams, and a new badge for institutions that have adopted the Chicago Principles on Freedom of Expression. This year, we also inaugurated a “Hidden Gems” initiative to spotlight outstanding academic honors programs around the country that provide rigorous curricula, excellent faculty, and a community of academically oriented students—all at a fair price.

It has never been more important to strengthen our institutions of higher learning and for families to make well-informed decisions. The erosion of general education programs, and our failure to provide a liberal arts core to students, has resulted in citizens who lack the framework for civil discourse and who are ill prepared for a competitive business environment. The good news is that interest in the What Will They Learn?® project has never been greater. User and social media traffic have almost doubled this year, and we are running a regular webinar for high school educators. For the first time, we are aggressively reaching out to school principals and associations of homeschool families. And 2021 will be the year that we convene our first What Will They Learn?®-focused conferences for high school counselors around the country.

For more information, look for us on Instagram at [@whatwilltheylearn](https://www.instagram.com/whatwilltheylearn) and visit the website at [WhatWillTheyLearn.com](https://www.WhatWillTheyLearn.com). To learn more about the project, or to request a complimentary copy of the print report, please contact us at wwtl@GoACTA.org. ●



ACTA Board Member's Institute Receives Prestigious NASDAQ Award

ACTA is proud to announce that the John W. Altman Institute for Entrepreneurship in the Farmer School of Business at Miami University has won the 2020 NASDAQ Center of Entrepreneurial Excellence Award. The Altman Institute, an ACTA Oasis of Excellence, is named for John Altman, a member of ACTA's board of directors, trustee emeritus at Miami University, and the school's first professor of entrepreneurship. The NASDAQ Award is bestowed by the Global Consortium of Entrepreneurship Centers and is widely considered the most prestigious honor that a university entrepreneurship center can receive.

The Altman Institute, with its hands-on undergraduate programs, has served over 3,200 students across all 117 ma-

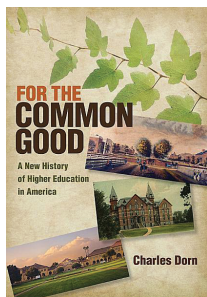
jors at Miami University and has been ranked among the top 10 schools for entrepreneurship studies for 13 consecutive years by *Entrepreneur Magazine* and the *Princeton Review*. What began as one entrepreneurship course in 1992 has grown to 37 undergraduate courses; 19 co-curricular programs; one institute; two centers; a funded research lab; two student-led investment funds; the Altman Summer Scholars Internship Program; a startup accelerator now in its sixth cohort; and a World Creativity & Innovation Week that is celebrated by over 50 countries each year and is recognized by the United Nations. "This is an incredible honor," remarks Timothy Holcomb, current director of the Altman Institute, "but it is really an ac-

knowledgment 28 years in the making, a reflection of the hundreds of students and faculty who have preceded us."

The institute is guided by John Altman's pioneering philosophy, termed the "virtuous cycle of entrepreneurship." America's unique system of entrepreneurship that provides so many opportunities "begins with individuals," says Dr. Altman. "Their business startups create jobs, which in turn create wealth, which in turn generates philanthropy." Through his own philanthropy, Dr. Altman supports the Altman Institute to inspire all students—no matter what their area of focus—"to adopt an entrepreneurial mindset so that we can do things better than we have in the past," thus starting the cycle over again. ●

The Steady Decline of the Liberal Arts in Higher Education

by Nathaniel Urban



For the Common Good: A New History of Higher Education in America is a synoptic history of higher education told through 10 engaging case studies that chronicle the emergence and rationale for new types of institutions—from the paradigmatic east coast liberal arts colleges, to the first agricultural and

normal schools, to the historically black and women's colleges that emerged after the Civil War and the later development of research universities and community colleges.

Author Charles Dorn, chair of the education department at Bowdoin College, traces the evolution of American higher education through four historical periods: the early national period, the antebellum and Civil War eras, Reconstruction through the Second World War, and the Cold War through the twenty-first century. Professor Dorn's book illustrates how the societal ethos of each period influenced higher education, progressively altering the academy's dedication to the public good. Although his book does

not directly address the problems roiling American higher education today, his discussion of its history sheds important light on contemporary challenges.

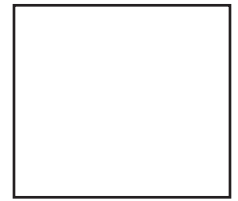
Professor Dorn suggests that higher education's abandonment of its traditional mission, and with it, its dedication to a core liberal arts curriculum, came about as colleges and universities adapted to the changing demands of the economy and the changing nature of the American student. In his early case studies, he documents instances of faculty members holding firm, resisting student and market pressures to erode curricula. As time went on, however, and universities became more complex, faculty at many institutions ceded governance authority to professional administrators who were more willing to yield to rebellious students and market demand, especially as the dominant societal ethos prioritized success in the marketplace over civic responsibility.

Professor Dorn's analysis shows how colleges and universities slowly drifted away from their original missions of advancing teaching and learning. We see the result in the weak general education programs that dominate today. ●

FROM the BOOKSHELF



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AMERICAN COUNCIL OF
TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI



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Georgia

Your impact on higher education can be measured.

Does your state provide an intellectually rich, high-quality college education at an affordable price?
See how your state is doing compared to others.

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<p>Administrative Spending <small>at University of Georgia</small></p> <p>Does your state flagship do a good job in controlling administrative bloat? For more information, visit HowCollegesSpendMoney.com.</p> <p>16th / 50 states</p> <p>\$2,926 per student</p>	<p>4-Year Graduation Rate</p> <p>Are college students graduating in four years? When students enter college but do not graduate, there are serious consequences for the student and taxpayers.</p> <p>42nd / 50 states</p> <p>28% graduate on time</p>

Make quality education a reality.
GoACTA.org/Policymakers

Flip over for more information

ACTA Provides Key Data to State Legislators

ACTA has launched a new initiative to assist lawmakers in all 50 U.S. states by providing them with information on key performance metrics of their 4-year public colleges and universities. Our Legislative One-Pagers rank each state on four key data points: Core Curriculum, Speech Code Policies, Administrative Spending, and 4-Year Graduation Rates. These are essential areas that policymakers must consider when evaluating the performance of their states' schools and how to allocate public funds.

Here are examples of the type of findings that these documents provide. The state of Georgia ranks first out of all 50 states on Core Curriculum, with Oregon and Alaska coming in last. This ranking evaluates colleges on how many of seven core subjects their students are required to take, as defined by ACTA's What Will They Learn?® project. Arizona, Mississippi, and New Hampshire tie for first on their Speech Code rankings, based on the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education's Speech Code Rating System, which assigns a "red light," "yellow light," or "green light" to institutions based on whether, and how much, their policies restrict free speech. The University of Hawaii-Manoa spends the least on administrative expenses, at \$1,757 per student, compared to the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, which spends a staggering \$8,303 per student. And Delaware graduates 64% of its students on time, as compared to Alaska, at just 16%.

Keeping public universities accountable to taxpayers is a vital function of state lawmakers. These metrics are designed to start in-depth conversations among legislators on how best to steward funds so that students receive an intellectually rich, high-quality education at an affordable price. ●